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DE RUEHNO #0062/01 0330849
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM USMISSION USNATO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0432
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
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RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 0013
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 0012
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0343

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 USNATO 000062

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/31/2017

TAGS: [NATO](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [AF](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: PAKISTANI PM AZIZ MEETS THE NAC: "WE ARE AN ANCHOR OF PEACE AND STABILITY"

Classified By: Ambassador Victoria Nuland, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. In his first meeting with the North Atlantic Council, Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz vigorously defended Pakistani actions against Al Qaeda and Taliban terrorists, and his nation's commitment to a peaceful, stable Afghanistan. He asserted that Pakistan was "an anchor of peace and stability," that NATO and Pakistan share key strategic objectives, and that NATO is playing a key role in regional security. Aziz acknowledged Pakistani shortcomings on border security and question marks surrounding the North Waziristan agreement, but also argued that Afghanistan and ISAF should do more on the Afghan side.

¶2. (C) In a question and answer session with Ambassadors, Allied interventions were restrained, with most saluting Pakistani efforts in the GWOT and on the border, and seeking greater political dialogue between NATO and Pakistan. Aziz, speaking beyond the confines of his initial script, and clearly expecting a tougher audience, vehemently denied Pakistani state institutions supported the Taliban, decried press briefings by Allied government officials that insinuated otherwise, and urged nations to raise concerns directly with the GOP. He highlighted \$350 million in Pakistani grant aid to Afghanistan, and urged greater, "Marshall Plan-type" aid from the international community. On mines and fences, he said that Pakistan would do selective fencing first, and had made no decisions on mining. He also noted Pakistani intentions to empty two refugee camps this year in conjunction with Afghanistan and the UN, and in closing, invited the SYG and the NAC to Pakistan. Throughout, Aziz showed his best side to a NAC that knows very little about Pakistan, and set the stage for further developments in NATO-Pakistani political relations and military cooperation. END SUMMARY.

An Upbeat Tour d,Horizon

¶3. (C) In his opening remarks, covered by the press, PM Aziz stated that NATO and Pakistan shared the same global objectives of peace, progress, and prosperity; stressed

Pakistan's commitment to realizing a strong and stable Afghanistan; and reiterated his government's thanks for NATO's help to Pakistan following the tragic earthquake of October 2005. SYG de Hoop Scheffer noted the critical role of Pakistan for ISAF and the region and called for closer NATO-Pakistani operational cooperation. The SYG hailed this first-ever NAC meeting with a Pakistani Prime Minister as an example of constructive political dialogue, and highlighted the joint commitment of NATO and Pakistan to fighting terrorism.

¶4. (C) After the press left the room PM Aziz laid out the theme of his presentation to the NAC: "Pakistan -- An Anchor of Peace and Stability." Aziz (who read from a prepared statement) proceeded to give the NAC a thorough briefing on his view of NATO, democracy in Pakistan, Pakistan's economy, relations with Afghanistan, Pakistan's contributions to the war on terrorism, and actions to tackle border challenges. PM Aziz also offered a quick look at Pakistan's relations with other major countries in the region.

NATO Ensuring Peace and Security in Our Neighborhood

¶4. (C) Aziz told the NAC that Pakistan viewed NATO as an organization playing a key role to ensure peace and security, "not just in the north Atlantic, but also in our neighborhood." In a riff he returned to repeatedly over the course of his remarks, the PM stressed that NATO and Pakistan share strategic interests, particularly the fight against terrorism and the struggle for peace and stability in Afghanistan. He stated that Pakistan was a valuable partner

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for NATO to face common challenges such as terrorism, WMD proliferation, regional conflicts, and the "deprivation" that bred extremism.

Democracy and a Strong Economy Means a Stronger Partner

¶5. (C) PM Aziz asserted that the Pakistani government was bringing democracy to the doorsteps of its people, pointing to the existence of opposition political parties, elections at a variety of levels, and flourishing privatized media as evidence of strong civil society. He stressed the government's commitment to economic, political, and social justice, highlighting economic reforms, impressive growth rates, and steps to empower women. He outlined Pakistan's efforts to build the infrastructure necessary to serve as a geostrategic economic hub for Central Asia, Afghanistan, and western China, particularly in the areas of transport and pipelines. He welcomed the U.S. initiative to support Reconstruction Opportunity Zones, and asked European nations to support this initiative, as well as Pakistan's request to the European Union for a free trade agreement.

CT, Border Issues, and Afghanistan Relations

¶6. (C) PM Aziz stressed Pakistan's opposition to terrorism in any form and contributions to the global war on terrorism, stating that Pakistan had suffered many casualties fighting al Qaeda and other extremists in its territory. He pointed to al Qaeda operatives killed and captured by Pakistan ("Al Qaeda's back is broken"), and Pakistani contributions to disrupting planned attacks around the globe. Aziz cited the Israel-Palestine dispute, the "war in Iraq," and Kashmir as three sources of anger, frustration, and deprivation that fueled terrorist recruitment. He urged Allies not to blame Islam for terrorism based on the actions of a few misguided individuals, and praised President Musharraf's policies of enlightened moderation.

17. (C Turning to the porous Afghanistan-Pakistan border, he stated that Pakistan had captured or killed over 800 Taliban/al Qaeda, and in his most pointed remarks, decried media reports and press briefings by "several nations around this table" for spreading baseless allegations of state support of the Taliban. He urged NATO nations to talk directly to Pakistan, rather than through the press, and to increase cooperation, such as more real-time intelligence sharing. He acknowledged that Taliban safehavens do exist among refugee camps, and that some extremist elements do reside in Pakistan, but challenged Allies frankly: "don't assume we are saying one thing and doing something else." He urged both Afghanistan and ISAF to pick up their games in dealing with border issues on the Afghan side. Aziz characterized President Musharraf's North Waziristan agreement as "misunderstood". Assuring the NAC that the Pakistani government had neither abdicated control nor ruled out the use of force, he said the deal was an effort to involve tribal elders to promote peace and stop harmful border crossings both ways, and that the government was still evaluating its effectiveness. Aziz also told Allies that Pakistan had decided on selective fencing of border areas, but would not move forward on mining at present. Finally, he laid out intentions to work with the Afghan government and the UN in repatriating refugees from two camps near the border back to Afghanistan over the coming months.

18. (C) Drawing the link with "western abandonment" of Afghanistan following the withdrawal of the USSR from Afghanistan, he expressed disbelief that one could argue Pakistan wanted Afghanistan to fail. He told the NAC that when Afghanistan suffers, Pakistan suffers, and pointed to an extraordinary grant of \$350 million of development aid to Afghanistan (Pakistan does not normally give foreign

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assistance, he stated), plus rapidly increasing trade ties as evidence of the importance Pakistan places on a stable Afghanistan. He welcomed Secretary Rice's recent announcement of an increase in U.S. assistance to Afghanistan, and called on Europe to do more, arguing for a "Marshall Plan-type" approach, aimed at winning Afghan hearts and minds. Telling the NAC that NATO had gotten it partially right but still had more to do (as part of a "comprehensive approach" by the larger international community) he stressed the importance of curtailing the influence of Afghan warlords and drug barons. Aziz labeled the nexus of drug money funding terrorism as a growing challenge, yet to be addressed adequately. Finally, he informed Allies that he had recently appointed a jirga commission to look into the modalities of moving forward the proposal of cross-border jirgas.

Pakistan's Regional Relations

19. (C) PM Aziz offered Allies a quick view of Pakistan's relations with prominent regional actors. He welcomed the continuing composite dialogue with India, and called for courage and flexibility in coming to a Kashmir settlement that respected the wishes and aspirations of Kashmiris. Characterizing Pakistan's nuclear decisions over the past decades as responses to India in an effort to maintain a "minimal deterrence," he highlighted that Pakistan does not seek regional hegemony, and will not accept it from others. He praised Pakistan-China relations as a model strategic partnership. While defending Iran's right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy under appropriate IAEA safeguards and international norms, he stated that Pakistan did not support a nuclear-armed Iran, and urged dialogue to resolve the problem without resorting to force that would further destabilize the regional situation. He expressed concern over sectarian violence in Iraq and the threat to its territorial integrity, and urged greater action by the international community so that Iraq not "continue to be a

breeding ground of terrorism." Again pointing to the Israel-Palestinian conflict as a source of terrorism, he urged the U.S. and Europe to restart the peace process.

Q's and A's, Plus an Invitation

¶10. (C) Ambassador Nuland welcomed PM Aziz's appearance before the NAC as an "historic day." She expressed condolences for recent Pakistani losses in Peshawar and Islamabad (as a result of recent suicide bombings), and told Aziz that Pakistan was a vital ally of the U.S. and other NATO nations in the war on terror both within Pakistan and globally. She told the PM that our views aligned on the need for a comprehensive approach encompassing military, political, and economic facets, and that 2007 was a critical year for NATO, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to show progress. The Ambassador echoed the PM's call for greater cohesion of economic plans in Afghanistan, but noted it was needed on both sides of the border, to include the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan. She stressed the importance the U.S. places on refugee issues, and reminded Allies of the financial challenges that will need to be addressed by the international community as part of any credible refugee resettlement plan. She welcomed recent ISAF-PAKMIL cooperation in the Paktika province of Afghanistan that had resulted in numerous enemy forces killed, but noted the need to improve operational coordination further. Finally, the Ambassador asked PM Aziz to consider more formally becoming a global partner of NATO, and to investigate possibilities to participate in joint training and greater political dialogue.

¶11. (C) The UK and Turkey joined Ambassador Nuland in welcoming this NAC meeting as an example of NATO's new approach to partnerships following Riga. Those three, plus

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Germany, welcomed greater practical cooperation between Pakistan and NATO, for example in select PfP activities. Several other issues emerged as common themes. The Netherlands, Canada, Turkey, and France joined the U.S. discussed the need to tackle refugee resettlement. The Netherlands, Turkey, Spain, Norway, also expressed interest in strengthening NATO's political dialogue with Pakistan. Turkey, Italy, Norway, the U.S., and Chairman of the Military Committee General Henault welcomed ISAF-Pakistan military cooperation in the Tripartite Commission. France urged increased Pakistani attention to Taliban centers in Pakistan from which cross-border attacks are staged.

¶12. (C) PM Aziz welcomed the suggestion by Ambassador Nuland and others for greater political dialogue, and said he would task the issue appropriately in Islamabad. Observing that most Ambassadors had probably never been to Pakistan, he invited the SYG and the NAC to Islamabad in the future.
NULAND